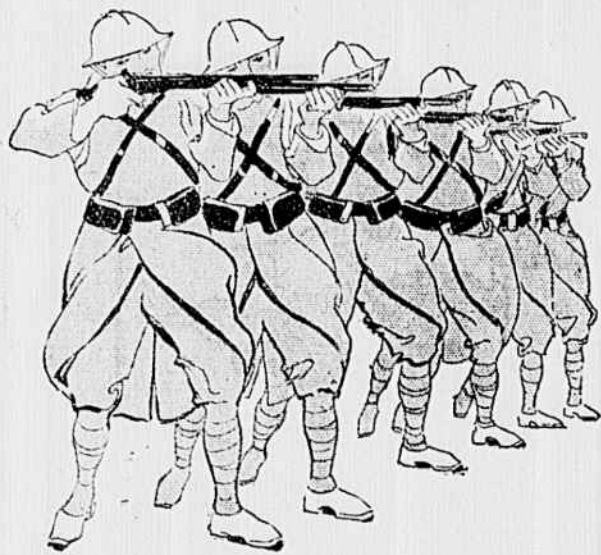


Cruellest Lie—or Truest Mercy?

The Amazing Deception Which Sent the Beautiful Spy Mata Hari, Rouged, Perfumed and Happy, to Face a Firing Squad Whose Guns She Believed Were Loaded with Blanks



"With a gay and voluptuous gesture Mata-Hari buried her face in her orange blossom bouquet, confident that the execution squad would fire only blank cartridges at her"



Two Pictures of Mata-Hari, the Oriental Dancer and Most Dangerous Spy of the War, Whose Death Agony Furnishes the Mystery That Is Now Exciting Paris—"The Woman With the Body of a Goddess and the Charms of a Demon."



EVERYBODY has heard and wondered at the way Mata-Hari, the fascinating Dutch Oriental dancer and spy, went to her death.

She was gayly dressed and acted as though she were enjoying a dramatic triumph instead of going to her execution. Was it the supreme courage of the woman that led her to face death so gayly? Even at the time many persons thought it was not rational that a woman who had become a spy for money should laugh at death. Was it not more probable that there was some other reason, hitherto concealed, for her strangely frivolous behavior?

A widely circulated report has become current in France that Mata-Hari had received a promise that she should be allowed to escape at the last moment, and that this accounted for her gay and callous demeanor.

The report appears to have originated with some friends of the picturesque and gallant young Frenchman, Pierre de Mortissac, who is now in retirement and exile and was a devoted admirer of the dancer. Those who are now unwilling to discuss it now, as they fear it will bring them into trouble. The French Government has ordered a searching investigation into the whole subject, with a view of finding out what truth there is in the current reports, and if they are substantiated of punishing with the gravest acts of state.

Mata-Hari, who had been intimate with some of the richest of the financiers and "jeunesse dorée" of France, Germany, England and other countries, was convicted, after very prolonged proceedings, of selling certain secrets of the tanks and other military information to the Germans.

Several highly placed Frenchmen made the most strenuous efforts to save her life, in spite of the possible danger to themselves, and among them not the least prominent was the gallant Pierre de Mortissac, one of the intimates of her admirers. She obtained an appeal from her first conviction by the court-martial, and her execution was in consequence delayed about three months, but the evidence of her guilt was so overwhelming, her acts of treason so numerous that the higher court could do nothing but confirm her sentence.

On October 8, 1917, the beautiful Mata-Hari, "the woman with the body of a goddess and the charms of a demon," was taken in a military automobile, under a guard of soldiers, from her prison in Paris to the shooting range at Vincennes, the place of execution. It was at Vincennes that the traitor Bolo met his fate, and that scores of spies and traitors—no one knows how many—faced the firing squad during the great war. Vincennes has a historic reputation as a place of military execution, for it was here that Napoleon Bonaparte secretly executed the most popular member of the Bourbon family, the Duke d'Enghien.

Mata-Hari was roused before dawn in her prison in Paris and driven to Vincennes, so that her execution might take place at sunrise and be free from public observation, according to custom. She was, however, treated with the utmost courtesy and consideration up to the last moment—more like a princess than a spy. She was supplied with champagne in abundance in her cell and with dainty meals from one of the most renowned chefs in Paris.

She dressed in her customary costly and luxurious manner during her imprisonment. Everything that manicures, hair-dressers and masseuses could do to maintain the charm and perfection of her body was freely permitted to her. Finally when the day of execution came, she was allowed to array herself in a most dazzling manner.

She wore a diaphanous costume of Indian silk trimmed with gold lace. Her lips were rouged in the approved Parisian manner, her eyes were pencilled and her

body perfumed, massaged and powdered. In her arms she carried—mark this detail—a huge bouquet of orange blossoms. Altogether she seemed more like a bride going to a wedding, an exotic Oriental sort of wedding, than a poor condemned prisoner.

And here is the reason why the condemned Mata-Hari was so gay and debonair. Some one high in authority, it is whispered, said to her before the execution:

"Mata-Hari, we are not going to kill you. You are too beautiful to die. I could not prevent the death sentence from being passed, but I have arranged that it shall not be carried into effect. When the soldiers are called to attention, preparatory to the order to fire, bury your face in this bouquet of orange blossoms. It will help you to maintain your composure. When you hear the report of the rifles fall to the ground, as though you were dead.

"They will fire blank cartridges, that will not harm even the surface of your beautiful skin. Do not make any outcry. Do not show any fear. I will take care of you afterwards."

This, then, was the reason why Mata-Hari faced her dreadful fate, not merely with calmness, but with brazen gaiety. When she arrived at Vincennes the military commandant took her record, according to the rules. She answered his questions with a gay toss of the head and a flash of her dark eyes. Without delay she was led to the parade ground.

The officer in command consulted her as to how she wished to face the firing squad. With the utmost nonchalance she declared that she would remain standing, with her eyes unbandaged. Before taking up her position, as ordered, she executed a pirouette with all her old dancer's skill. Her frivolity amazed the soldiers and filled them with a certain admiration. Her disregard of death has since then been common talk among old soldiers.

"I am ready whenever you are, my children," she called out cheerfully. "Fire straight at my heart."

At the word of command twenty soldiers raised their rifles to their shoulders. Mata-Hari buried her face in her great bouquet of orange blossoms with a voluptuous gesture.

"Fire!" rang out the command. Mata-Hari crumpled to the earth, her body pierced by nearly twenty bullets. Someone had fooled her. But what was the meaning of this tragic fooling?

Did somebody tell her she would be saved just to spare her feelings, to save her from the agony of anticipating death and to prevent the painful scenes which a woman might easily have caused? Was it really kindness thus to deceive her? Was it the French conception of chivalry that prompted the act—the chivalry that says a woman should never suffer any avoidable distress? Was it the plan of some official, who aimed to avoid shocking scenes which could certainly reflect no credit on the Government?

That the deception was due to one of these causes is the opinion of half of those who have heard of the strange episode. On the other hand, there are others who believe that the plan to rescue her was the work of a lover; that it was meant to be carried through successfully, and that through some other official's act the scheme was frustrated. The great problem, then, is to find out if anybody had the power to save her and who it was that interfered with his scheme.

According to an artist, who moved in the same circle as Mata-Hari and her friends, the man who told her that he would rescue her added these words after those already quoted:

"After you have fallen to the earth the soldiers will go away. Then I will pick up



The Intrigue of "La Tosca" and the Roman Chief of Police, a Historic Episode That Closely Resembles the Story of Mata-Hari's Death.

your body tenderly, put it in a coffin, and transport it over the frontier into Spain, where we can live happily. Have no fear, dear heart."

There is a horrible fascination in speculating what must have been the agony of Mata-Hari when for an instant she felt the touch of the bullets and knew that she had been fooled. How much suffering is it possible to compress into the brief space in which one can feel the deadly impact of the bullet before life departs? There are some who argue that a lifetime of suffering can be condensed into an instant. If that be so, Mata-Hari must have suffered to the full, for she loved life to the uttermost, and she thought that she had been tricked would have been unspeakable torment.

If Mata-Hari's death was due to a functionary who deceived her would-be rescuer it bears a curious resemblance to the famous drama of "La Tosca," which is well known to have been founded on actual events of the Napoleonic period in Rome. In that case the singer "Tosca" had obtained from the chief of police, in return for the promise of her favors, an order that the soldiers should fire blank cartridges at her condemned lover. At the same time the vil-

lains chief gave secret orders that they should shoot to kill. Thus poor Tosca had the agony of watching the killing of her lover when she was anticipating the delight of leading him away to safety.

Pierre de Mortissac, whom the Parisian club world insists on associating with the Mata-Hari tragedy, was one of the most brilliant figures in Paris. He won the Cross of the Legion of Honor in the war and was desperately wounded. Then he became known as the latest and most infatuated of the many lovers of Mata-Hari.

He has repented of all his follies and extravagances and to-day is atoning for the past as a bare-footed monk in the cloisters of the Cartuja of Miraflores, near Burgos, in Spain.

Mata-Hari, in many ways the most sinister and picturesque figure of the war, was the daughter of a Dutch East Indian planter and a native woman. She learned to dance as a temple girl, married a Scotch baronet, Sir Malcolm MacLeod, whom she deserted, and then went to Europe. Her first successes as a dancer were made in Germany, and there she attracted a circle of admirers, including several prominent noblemen and financiers. It was then that the German secret service planned to use her as a spy.